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WILLIAM CONKLIN CUSICK

HAROLD ST. JOHN.

(With portrait.)

EASTERN OREGON is a region of high rugged mountains, sandy deserts, and deep hot river canyons. The settlers are few and scattered, yet the flora of this vast region is already well known. The tireless zeal of one man, both farmer and botanist, has accomplished this feat of exploration. He was William Conklin Cusick, and it is with sincere regret that his death is recorded.¹

Mr. Cusick was born in Adams County, Illinois, on February 21st, 1842. He was named for his great grandfather on his father's side. His grandfather, Henry Cusick, a weaver by trade, left the north of Ireland for New York City, probably after the Revolutionary War.

Mr. Cusick's early boyhood was spent in Illinois, where he attended a country school, from the age of four to that of eleven. Then his parents, in 1853, joined the great westward surging tide of settlers. With an ox-team they crossed the "Oregon Trail." William was the eldest child, so, during a large part of this journey, he walked and drove the oxen. "We got to the south pass of the Rocky Mountains, which was then the eastern line of Oregon on the 4th of July. I remember seeing *Calochortus Nuttallii* growing among the sage brush in the valley of the Snake River." Ascending the Powder River they went near North Powder, where later Mr. Cusick took up a ranch. Crossing the dividing ridge they descended the valley of the Grande

¹ The writer wishes to acknowledge valuable assistance in the preparation of this biography from Mrs. S. F. Cusick, Mr. W. W. Eggleston, Mr. J. C. Nelson, and Dr. B. L. Robinson.

Ronde River past Union, where he spent his last days. From there they followed the "Oregon Trail" through the Blue Mountains to Walla Walla, then down the south bank of the Columbia River. They settled near Kingston, Linn County, Oregon.

In this new home, he continued his schooling. When he was 20 years old he went to the Lacreole Academy at Dallas in Polk County, where he continued his studies for a year and a half. Then for two years young Cusick himself taught school. The succeeding year he returned to the same academy. In 1864 he went to Willamette University where he was enrolled as a Junior. Here he studied mathematics, higher algebra, physics, and geology. After finishing this year at college, he enlisted as a volunteer in the Union Army. He was assigned to the Quartermaster Corps, and was stationed at Fort Lapwai, Idaho. Later he was transferred to a camp near Ukiah, Umatilla County, Oregon, and then to Camp Polk, near Sisters, Crook County, Oregon. "In '65 (summer of) I was 'soldiering' in those (Blue) Mt'ns and we found these onions (*A. Geyeri*) a valuable addition to our stock of 'Bacon + beans'." Mr. Cusick told the writer about this part of his life. There was little for a soldier to do at this isolated fort, and time hung heavy on his hands.

Through a friend in Portland, Oregon, he obtained a copy of Dr. Asa Gray's "First Lessons in Botany." "I . . . studied it pretty carefully one winter. Since then I have got most of Dr. Gray's works and the most I have learned from books I have got from them." This little book supplied the stimulus. By explaining their morphology it opened to him the study of the taxonomy of the hundreds of plants flowering on every side. He was one of that best type of botanists, the kind that is born, not made. When only eleven years old he had begun to notice the flowers, but at no time in his schooling did he have any instruction in botany. Born with the love of botany, his extensive knowledge of it was self-taught.

Obtaining his discharge from the army in 1866, he returned to western Oregon and settled near Salem. He again turned to teaching, but at the same time busied himself with market gardening.

In the fall of 1872, with his brother Frank, he returned to eastern Oregon. Together they acquired a ranch on the Powder River, where they lived and worked jointly. At this time, William began to pay more attention to his botanical work. As he wrote, "I did little in studying or collecting till coming to eastern Oregon in 1872.

I was so fortunate as to make the acquaintance of Dr. R. D. Nevius, and in the fall of 1880 Dr. S. Watson spent a few days at my cabin. I got much botanical information from these gentlemen." In 1887 the brothers sold this place and both moved to North Powder where they bought adjoining ranches. The two brothers still continued coöperating in the farm work. William's ranch, however, consisted largely of pasture land. Consequently he was able to leave his farm work and go on extended botanical trips.

His first lengthy trip was in 1885 when he went to Steins Mountains in Malheur County. The year 1886, he was able to devote the whole season to collecting. He gathered his specimens in sets of twelve and made arrangements to sell his duplicates. This proved to be profitable enough so that he followed this scheme almost every year afterwards. Following a period of several years when he was prevented from doing any extensive botanical work, he resumed this activity in 1896. In August of that year, with Prof. C. V. Piper, he made a collecting trip into the Wallowa Mountains. In 1897 he revisited Malheur County and pushed on to Harney County. In 1898 he revisited Steins Mountains, and continued as far as the Santa Rosa Mountains of Nevada. The next year, 1899, he explored the Seven Devil Mountains in western Idaho. In 1901, with his step-son Oscar, he explored the eastern and southeastern counties of Oregon. The following year, 1902, accompanied by his nephew R. G. Cusick, he worked the central part of the State, then the southwestern, as far down as the California line, and returned by Crater Lake. On returning from this trip he wrote, "Southwestern Oregon is certainly a very interesting region but I fear I cannot go there again. I think this is my last season of collecting to sell. There is not enough pay in it. Expenses are very heavy and after these are paid there isn't much left for me." This was his last long trip. On his first ones he went alone, but in later years his step-son, O. A. Cusick, or his nephew, R. G. Cusick, accompanied him.

Year after year, he explored and made collections from the Blue Mountains and the Wallawas. These trips, though often lasting several weeks, were usually made alone. He never carried fire arms or fishing tackle as he felt that when unmolested the wild animals would not trouble him, and that he was too busy with his botanical collecting to waste any time in fishing. He would load his botanical outfit and camping materials on a pony and start off into the most rugged mountains, or with a team of horses and a wagon into the

bleakest desert, and be gone for weeks at a time. He would reappear laden down with specimens, carefully selected and well prepared. During the winter he would identify them. Such as were too puzzling he referred to Dr. Watson, Dr. Greenman, Prof. Piper, and other specialists. On reading over the files of letters written to these botanists, one occasionally finds letters expressing irritation or indignation that this particular botanist had been slow in sending the list of determinations that Cusick had requested. Until they were named, he could not sell his specimens, so he was naturally anxious to receive the list of identifications. He probably did not realize how many others were asking similar favors of these busy people.

The worth of his work was abundantly recognized by other botanists. In 1908 Prof. M. E. Jones named a new genus of Umbelliferae, *Cusickia*, in his honor. Many species have been named *Cusickii*, after him, so many, in fact, that the writer has not attempted to compile a list of them.

Though thus active in supplying the material on which others paved important records, he was himself exceedingly modest in the matter of publication. So far as can be learned only two articles from his pen have a botanical bearing and both of these are short notes, namely: Forest Fires in Oregon, Bot. Gaz. viii. 176 (1883), and *Ribes aureum*, Bot. Gaz. xv, 24 (1890).

In 1913, he sold his own herbarium to the University of Oregon, at Eugene, Oregon. The greater part of this winter he spent at Eugene, working over his specimens for the University.

The next year he felt the lack of his herbarium so keenly that he started in again with the greatest energy to assemble a new one. In the fall of 1921 when the writer visited Mr. Cusick at Union, Oregon, his collection had grown to 3600 sheets, fully half of them being mounted. By this time he had had a stroke, and his eyesight had failed so that he could no longer work on his specimens. Consequently he sold these collections to the State College of Washington at Pullman, Washington. His sight and his strength had begun to fail, but his interest was as keen as ever. He told the writer with the greatest enthusiasm of interesting regions that he was planning to visit. Together we talked of a future trip to the alpine slopes of Eagle Cap, or the rugged ravine of the Imnaha, though it was evident at the time that he would never make another long collecting trip.

He was married in October, 1892, to Mrs. Emma A. Alger, who died in February, 1894. When his wife died he was left with a mortgaged home and two children by her former marriage, Philip Alger aged 18, and Oscar, aged 9 years. He supported Philip at the Oregon Agricultural College till, when nearly ready to graduate, the young man left to be married. Young Oscar Alger, he adopted as Oscar Cusick. This younger boy was also sent to college, but he too left before graduating, to get married. It is not generally known, but it was these responsibilities which kept Mr. Cusick from doing more botanical work during this part of his life.

Mr. Cusick always took an active part in Church and in civic affairs. His neighbors knew that he went off on long trips to pick flowers, but they did not hold that against him. His modesty was so great that he seldom talked about this work, lest it should be interpreted as boasting. He would never allow any account of his life or work to appear in the local papers. It was very nearly the same with his family. Of course they knew how much time he spent on his work, but it seemed to them that he was just messing around with his specimens. The only indication they saw of the importance of his botanical work was the occasional visit from Dr. Watson or Prof. Piper or some government specialist from Washington, D. C., and they little realized that Mr. Cusick's name and work were known to scientists half way around the world.

Mr. Cusick died at his brother's home, Union, Oregon, October 7, 1922. He is survived by one brother, S. F. Cusick, of Union, Oregon; one sister, Mrs. S. E. Daley, of Scio, Oregon; and two half-sisters, Mrs. Hattie Dodd, of Middleton, Idaho; and Mrs. A. N. Busick, of Union, Oregon.

STATE COLLEGE OF WASHINGTON, Pullman, Wash.

NOTES ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF *NAJAS* IN NORTHEASTERN AMERICA.

M. L. FERNALD.

IN studying the four species of *Najas* which occur in the northeastern states and Canada so many discrepancies have been found between the published ranges and the occurrence of these plants as shown by specimens, that the following notes seem worth recording.